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ABSTRACT

By means of a literature review and teacher survey, the following key questions are addressed: (1) How widespread is the problem of professional burnout among public school teachers? (2) What are the professional characteristics of teachers who suffer from burnout? (3) In what ways do teachers differ in the amount of job-related stress and dissatisfaction they experience? (4) Is the process of burnout modified by teaching climate? What conditions promote burnout? Which reduce it? (5) What are the specific sources of stress and dissatisfaction which are associated with professional burnout among public school teachers? and (6) What are the most frequently cited effects of burnout? Responses to a questionnaire were received from 939 San Diego teachers. The survey instrument consisted of 66 items divided into five sections: (1) demographics; (2) teaching climate; (3) areas of stress or dissatisfaction commonly experienced by teachers on their jobs; (4) psychological effects--the level of burnout which the teacher experiences; and (5) physical effects. Responses are presented in tabular format with accompanying narrative analysis. Suggestions are made for future research. A copy of the survey questionnaire is appended. (JD)

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PROFESSIONAL BURNOUT AMONG PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS

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INTRODUCTION

During the past decade, numerous articles and books have been written about the phenomenon of occupational burnout as it affects a specific occupational group: those in the helping professions (Pines, Aronson, Kafry, 1981; Maslach, 1976). These people, whose work involves continuous direct contact with the recipients of the services they provide, appear to be particularly susceptible to this condition which has become known as burnout. Burnout has been described and typified in numerous ways. Maslach, one of the leading researchers in this field, has stated:

> What we see happening among many of these professionals is a gradual loss of caring about the people they work with. Over time they find that they simply cannot sustain the kind of commitment called for in the personal encounters which are the essence of their jobs. . . . [They experience] a very special and distinctive kind of emotional exhaustion; losing positive feelings, sympathy and respect for their clients or patients. A second development crystallizes into a cynical and dehumanizing perception of their clients that labels them in derogatory ways. Seen by professionals as deserving of their problems, a blaming-the-victim philosophy sets in that in many cases appears to cause the

quality of client services to deteriorate.

(Maslach, 1978, pp. 57-58)

Burnout literature has been directed primarily at the individual victim of burnout. This has seemed appropriate since many, if not most, of the professionals referred to (e.g., psychiatrists, psychologists, counselors, social workers) practice alone or in small organizational groups. However, when burnout strikes members of large helping organizations such as hospitals or schools the consequences can be extremely serious. It is possible that a greater understanding by management of the various components of the burnout process will create new avenues for improving the quality of services provided, employee satisfaction, personnel retention and recruitment, public image, and so on. This study of public school teachers was undertaken to explore this phenomenon of burnout in a large, yet specific, at-risk organizational group.

Definitional Difficulties

Serious difficulties are encountered in attempting to formulate an operational definition of the term 'burnout.' There is no clear agreement among researchers in the field as to exactly what burnout is. This is mainly because as the use of the term has increased, it has been expanded to

include an increasing number of conditions applied to an increasing number of situations. "Burnout" is a provocative term, and people readily relate to it and seem to know instinctively what it means in terms of their own personal experiences (Maslach, 1982). The problem is that the word eventually takes on so many meanings that it may cease to mean anything at all. This difficulty, however, can be overcome to some extent by analyzing the many definitions of burnout in the literature to expose what they have in common.

There is general agreement among researchers that burnout occurs at the individual level (rather than the group or organizational level) and is an internal psychological experience involving feelings, attitudes, motives, and expectations. Further, burnout is a negative experience with negative consequences for the individual. In addition to these basic points, there are three

identifiable dimensions of burnout (Maslach, 1982):

1. Exhaustion. This dimension is described as wearing out, loss of energy, depletion, debilitation and fatigue. This appears to be a central component of burnout that can manifest itself physically, psychologically, or as a combination of both.

2. Depersonalization. In this dimension there is a negative change in attitudes and responses toward others, especially the recipients of the services the professional provides. This is usually accompanied by increased irritability and a loss of idealism about the work.

3. Personal accomplishment. This dimension entails negative responses to oneself and one's personal accomplishments typified by depression, low morale, interpersonal withdrawal, reduced productivity, inability to cope with pressure, feelings of failure, and poor self-esteem.

Effects of Burnout

An example of how the above components of burnout are expressed in the literature can be found in the work of Pines, Aronson, and Kafrey (1981). They describe burnout in a general sense as a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion characterized by physical depletion, by feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, by emotional drain, and by the development of negative attitudes

towards work, life, and other people. This state is precipitated by constant or repeated emotional pressure associated with an intense involvement with people over long periods of time. The physical exhaustion component of burnout, according to Pines, is characterized by reports of increased susceptibility to illness, headaches, nausea, back pains, accident proneness, frequent attacks of virus and flu, and a paradoxical combination of tiredness and sleep disturbances. Accompanying these physical problems are the symptoms produced by the emotional exhaustion component of burnout. This entails feelings of depression and entrapment which lead in extreme cases to mental illness or even thoughts of suicide. Finally, the mental exhaustion component is manifested by the development of negative attitudes about self, work, and life in general. Reports of mental exhaustion include lowered self-concept and feelings of inferiority, inadequacy, and incompetency (Pines et al., 1981, pp. 17-19).

The effects of burnout, general as they are, become more meaningful when they are considered in terms of a single, specific occupation. A professional group that appears to be particularly susceptible to burnout is that of school teachers employed by the public school systems in the United States. This is an extremely large

population which has, up to now, been conspicuously absent in the serious literature on burnout. Job Stress and Burnout, edited by Paine (1982), contains articles by the leading researchers in the field of professional burnout. Although this volume is a relatively thorough examination of the subject, the professional group of teachers is not mentioned. Nevertheless, all of the symptoms discussed above, with only occasional slight changes to reflect the teaching environment, can be found in public school teachers' reports of burning out:

> Teachers experiencing burnout often have physical maladies such as frequent colds, headaches, dizziness, or diarrhea. If unchecked, these ailments may turn into ulcers, colitis, or asthma, or they may cause loss of appetite and loss of sexual interest. Teachers report that their self-concept drops to a new low as they question the meaning of teaching. They see themselves becoming less and less effective with children and colleagues. The teacher feels guilty, incompetent as an educator and finally inadequate as a person. This, in turn, affects personal relationships and can result in total emotional breakdown. (Hendrickson, 1979, p. 37)

Many teachers experiencing these problems choose to leave the profession. This alone is damaging in that those individuals who change careers are frequently the most idealistic and dedicated teachers. These are serious losses to the organization. However, it is those teachers who are burning out and staying in the classroom who may be creating the most negative effects upon their "clients": in this case, the students.

Considering numbers alone, one elementary school teacher has direct contact with thirty to fifty students per year; one junior high or high school teacher as many as three or four hundred. Teachers are role models and teachers' psychological states (such as anxiety level) affect the psychological states of their students (Doyal & Forsyth, 1973; Zimmerman, 1970). Makiel (1979) found that children respond to teachers who are physically or emotionally ill by developing physical complaints themselves.

Causes of Teacher Burnout

Nearly all of the literature dealing with teacher burnout appears in education journals or the popular press. There has been little systematic research to determine the actual causes of burnout with any degree of certainty.

In the available literature, however, burnout is consistently paired with chronically stressful conditions in the teaching profession. The sources of this stress, therefore, are given as the causes for burnout (Collins & Masley, 1980). This assumes a relationship based on correlational reasoning which involves the usual cause and effect and directionality difficulties:

> For example, . . . do certain stressful events produce burnout, does burnout sensitize the individual to stress, or do certain occupations attract people who both burn out easily and experience a lot of stress? (Pines et al., 1981, p. 37)

Research is needed to determine if, in fact, stress directly causes burnout. However, because of the intuitive logic of the argument and because of subjective reports from teachers themselves that certain stress-producing conditions are indeed causing their feelings of burnout, a discussion of the stressors teachers face is warranted.

A major source of stress appears to stem from the teacher's sense of isolation; being cut off from other adults, other professionals, colleagues, and virtually "trapped" in a room full of children all day (Dubrin, 1979). At times this isolation is so complete that the teacher goes from his/her car in the morning directly to the classroom and in the evening returns directly to the car without any adult contact during the entire day. This is dangerous because of the lack of intellectual stimulation, and because it aggravates an already stressful situation by preventing teachers from receiving emotional support from others who are experiencing similar professional problems. It has been demonstrated that professionals who are experiencing symptoms of burnout will adopt a facade of being calm and fully in control in order to camouflage their fears and doubts. As a result of the lack of contact and communication between teachers,

each feels that s/he is the only one experiencing the problem and sees everyone else as secure and confident. This component contributing to stress in teaching has been termed "pluralistic ignorance" (Maslach, 1978).

Perhaps the most unquestionable source of stress a person can encounter is the fear of physical attack, pain, or violence (Goldstein, Baker, & Jamison, 1980). If such a threat occurs frequently or is present continuously, it will have an undeniable and rapid effect on functioning. Physical violence against teachers is increasing. In 1979 the National Educational Association conducted a nationwide Teacher Opinion Poll (McGuire, 1979). The results showed that an estimated 110,000 teachers (1 out of every 20) were physically attacked on school property during the 1978-1979 school year. This is an increase of 57% over the previous year. Approximately 10% of these victims required medical attention for physical injuries and an additional 10% required attention for the psychological trauma they experienced.

Another separate, but related, problem teachers face is discipline. Although classroom management and discipline is one of the areas for which teachers are prepared, it is not foremost in their minds when entering the profession, nor do they expect it to be central in their

goals as teachers. The fact is, however, that teachers are finding it necessary to spend increasing amounts of their time on the activity of discipline. Added to this is the great discomfort many teachers feel at having to behave in unnaturally strong and authoritarian ways to achieve order in the classroom or on the school grounds. This usually proves to be an emotionally exhausting routine in itself and even more so when combined with the feelings of lack of personal accomplishment caused by so much time being "wasted" on disciplinary activities (Walsh, 1979).

A further development which has come into prominence in recent years and is singled out in the literature regarding public teacher dissatisfaction is teachers' general distrust and feelings of distance from school administrators. This is evidenced by the growing adversarial positions taken by teachers and administrators indicated by increased collective bargaining practices and the rise of more militant teacher unions (Rothstein, 1980). Teachers are growing increasingly sensitive to being excluded from the decision-making process and are desiring more control over their own jobs. A survey was conducted in Southern California during a recent teacher strike.

> Both groups [teachers and administrators] were dissatisfied with the roles they had played in

> intensifying conflict in their schools. Administrators raised questions about their own provocative behavior, their dual loyalties towards those who were above them in the management hierarchy and those they were appointed to serve, and the paranoid slant that crept into their thinking as the situation worsened.
>
> Teachers were dissatisfied with their lack of unity, the status of teachers, and the provocative and intimidating behavior of administrators. They thought that teaching was the most important work in the schools and that they should be rewarded with better salaries and conditions. Teachers were angered by the caste-like structure of the schools; they resented their supervisors and felt they were ineffective in their jobs. (Rothstein, 1980, p. 227)

Teachers also felt that their associations with administrators were characterized by a general feeling of unfriendliness and distrust. These anti-administrative attitudes left teachers confused about their own career opportunities, since their only hope for advancement is to become a part of the administration itself. The observation has been made (Rothstein, 1980) that frequently, teachers considering receiving an administrative credential often feel as if they are betraying their friends and co-workers and fear they are becoming one of the "enemy."

As teachers experience the strain and pressure of interacting with their administrations they have only to turn around to find further aggravation from the parents of the children they teach and from the public in general. Except in rare instances, the only time a public school

teacher has any contact with the pupils' parents is when the parents have a complaint or when the teacher has requested a meeting, usually due to a problem with the child, and even then, parents frequently fail to attend (Feshbach, 1976). When a child is functioning adequately in school, the situation is considered normal and no special notice is taken of the teacher's efforts in creating such a condition. Furthermore, there appears to be an anti-public school teacher bias on the part of the press (Dubrin, 1979). Teachers read negative things about themselves especially in the form of implicit blame for the alleged decline in the quality of public education. The job of school teacher in this country has carried with it a stigma of being an unimportant or frivolous occupation lacking prestige and esteem (Jersild, 1955). Lacking any semblance of a support system from the public, the parents, the administration, or fellow professionals, it becomes an easy task for teachers to begin to see themselves in the same dim light. Basic learning theory has shown us that when a behavior continues unrewarded it will diminish and eventually cease. One could view teacher burnout as the extinction of unrewarded behavior.

This lack of psychological and emotional rewards is countered not at all by financial rewards. While

little attention is given to the low salary issue in the school teacher burnout literature, it appears to be an important factor in the burnout process. It is common knowledge that no one enters the teaching profession expecting to make a lot of money, but there does seem to be a growing feeling among teachers that if they must endure the increasing difficulties and discomforts discussed above, greater financial consideration is to be expected. However, due to budget constraints, such money is usually not forthcoming. As teachers' salaries have failed to keep up with inflation rates, teachers have fallen farther and farther behind in earning power and are beginning to sense a financial disrespect for the job they are doing (Scrivens, 1979).

Beyond salaries themselves, teachers have been subject to another financial burden which is worsening rapidly: shrinking public school budgets (Dubrin, 1979). Decreasing state revenues combined with tighter federal fiscal policies have cut deeply into school supplies and equipment. Audio-visual presentations, recreation equipment, crafts and sports supplies have aided the teacher in the past in creating diverse and tension relieving activities for the children as well as the teacher. Budget cuts have made these much less available, placing an even heavier responsibility on the teacher to fill up every minute of the daily schedule.

Finally, the amount of administrative paperwork that today's teachers are required to complete has increased to the point that it seriously interferes with either the teacher's free time or classroom effectiveness or both. Moreover, teachers do not feel that the large volume of paperwork should be a part of their jobs as professionals. There are reports of teachers who have actually left the profession because of the paperwork burden (G. Boyle, personal communication, November 15, 1983).

Measures of Burnout

There has been relatively little research into methods for measuring the various dimensions of teacher burnout discussed above. There are several published burnout scales designed to assess the problem as it applies to the helping professions in general. The one used most widely is the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI).

The MBI consists of 21 items divided into three subscales: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. A high score on the first two scales and a low score on the third would place a person high on a not-burned-out to burned-out continuum. The MBI has been shown to be a fairly reliable and valid tool (Maslach & Jackson, 1979) and has been used on occasion with teachers (Iwanicki & Schwab, 1981; Fielding & Gall, 1982).

Other general measures relating to the burnout construct are a tedium measure, a job alienation scale, a burnout self-assessment tool, and the Staff Burnout Scale (SBS) developed by Shinn (1982).

All of these instruments fall short of an adequate measure for teachers in several ways. First, none is designed expressly for teachers. Therefore, face, and possibly content, validity is decreased and the possibility of error due to misinterpreted items is increased. Second, with the exception of the SBS, only the psychological effects of burnout are considered without concern for other possible indicators such as excessive behavior or physical ailments. Third, there is no attempt in any of the scales to relate the measure of burnout with possible causes such as the stressors encountered on the job or working climate factors. Indeed, in both the tedium measure and the self-assessment scale there is no reference to work at all. Fourth, none of the measures include items to assess the effect of mediating variables such as age, sex, experience level, etc., in order to try to determine which teachers may be more or less susceptible to burnout.

A few burnout measures have been designed to assess the problem among teachers specifically. One of these, administered to teachers in the Worcester (Massachusetts) Public School System (Collins, 1980), consisted of

demographic variables (age, sex, years of experience) and a list of stressful job factors to be rated by teachers for intensity. These job factors were then divided into high or low categories. The factors of involuntary transfer, student discipline, and paperwork were rated the highest whereas communication with students, communication with teachers, and feelings of isolation were among the lowest ratings. This study made no attempt to assess the effects of these job stressors and it was unclear if ratings teachers gave for the stressors were a personal self-assessment or an objective appraisal of how they thought most were affected.

A second and somewhat more complete study examined the relationships between level of teacher burnout and professional variables (grade level, years of experience, etc.) and personal variables (sex, age, marital status, etc.) (Borthwick, 1982). Level of burnout was measured by the MBI which, as discussed above, may not be optimally applicable to teachers. It was found that high school teachers, teachers with fewer years of teaching experience, and women teachers exhibited the greatest levels of burnout as measured by the MBI.

Finally, a third questionnaire study examined personality and situational correlates of teacher stress and burnout (Fielding & Gall, 1982). It was reported that teachers having negative attitudes and beliefs about

students, an external locus of control, and a low tolerance for ambiguity suffer greater amounts of stress and burnout. This study should be criticized from a number of perspectives. First, although the relationship between these personality variables and burnout is correlational, the authors drew conclusions which are quite questionable regarding directionality. It is arguable that negative attitudes, blaming of externalities for such attitudes, and a lowered willingness to put up with ambiguous conditions would be promoted by stress and burnout, not vice-versa. Second, the measure of burnout used in this study was poorly conceived. Teachers were simply asked to rate how burned out they felt. Third, the schools surveyed were very homogeneous in characteristics of both students and teachers. This placed limitations on the range of possible findings. Fourth, the measures used for the personality variables were general scales and not geared to teachers in their profession. Finally, the sample size of 162 teachers taken from 9 schools is small for statistical confidence. The authors of the above study, aware of some of these difficulties, suggested that future research undertake to design measures which are more directly related to teachers' experiences. They additionally propose that grade level and type of school be more greatly varied so

that an assessment of school climate might assume increased dimensionality.

Prevention and Intervention

With few exceptions, all the articles dealing with teacher burnout include suggestions for combatting and reducing the discomfort associated with the burnout process. Although these techniques are, for the most part, taken from research done on stress-reduction in general, there is no experimental evidence that any of them serves to intervene in the burnout process itself.

Scrivens, a victim of teacher burnout himself, later returned to teaching and developed a 16-point plan for preventing burnout (1979). His plan includes such suggestions as getting plenty of exercise, avoid mixing work and home life, develop a hobby, get adequate sleep, keep a journal, continue to learn and study, travel, set realistic goals, take a sabbatical or leave of absence. Although intuitively these suggestions may appear to relieve stress (and most probably did for Dr. Scrivens) there is no clear evidence that they are effective (or generalizable). There are numerous other such lists developed in the same vein and subject to the same criticisms (Dubrin, 1979; Hendrickson, 1979; Moe, 1979).

Within large organizations, the job of preventing or intervening in the burnout process most likely belongs to middle management. In public school districts, this would mean at the school site and district office rather than at the school board level. Some actions may be taken by teacher organizations such as unions, but without district cooperation. The conflicts created might only serve to add to the problem.

A major problem with present intervention attempts is that not enough is known or understood about the components of burnout as discussed in this introduction. Many heretofore unanswered questions must be addressed in order for intervention strategies to be properly focused and effective. The purpose of this study was to attempt to answer some of these questions.

Questions to Be Addressed

This was an exploratory study in an area where relatively little systematic research has been undertaken. For this reason it was unrealistic to attempt to develop formal hypotheses. Instead the purpose of the present study was to enlarge the body of information on teacher burnout and provide a basis and directives for continued research.

Specifically, this study addressed the following key questions:

1. How widespread is the problem of professional burnout among public school teachers?

2. What are the professional characteristics of teachers who suffer from burnout?

3. In what ways do teachers differ in the amount of job-related stress and dissatisfaction they experience?

4. Is the process of burnout modified by teaching climate? What conditions promote burnout? Which reduce it?

5. What are the specific sources of stress and dissatisfaction which are associated with professional burnout among public school teachers?

6. What are the most frequently cited effects of burnout?

METHOD

Subjects

The population targeted for study was teachers in the San Diego Unified School District in San Diego, California. Attempts to enter the organization through the usual district administrative channels were met repeatedly with resistance. The district has a policy of limiting access to its personnel for research purposes only to district employees. Exceptions to this policy are made when it is felt that the research proposed is consonant with the needs and goals of the district. A proposal to explore the problem of burnout within their ranks of teachers did not meet this criterion. This decision was understandable in light of the fact that school districts are generally beset (the word beleaguered also comes to mind) with problems of poor press and public image. The idea of allowing a researcher to come in and possibly uncover additional difficulties is, quite naturally, seen as undesirable. However, this research, intended to enlighten, not expose, might very well have provided management with valuable and needed insights into many of the district's problems.

Proposing the intended research to the San Diego Teachers Association (SDTA) produced extremely cooperative results. SDTA is the collective bargaining organization representing teachers in the San Diego Unified School District. Their board of directors voted to distribute the

survey questionnaire and to collect it back from their membership. A total of 939 completed questionnaires were collected. SDTA's cooperation was prompted by their feeling that results from such a study might offer support for SDTA in their negotiations with the district administration.

The Instrument

A new instrument for studying burnout among public school teachers was developed which attempted to avoid or reduce many of the difficulties associated with previous instruments as discussed previously. Existing professional burnout literature, adaptations of items from various burnout scales, and recommendations from teachers, including the 16-member board of directors of SDTA, were all considered in creating the new survey questionnaire (Appendix A). It consists of 66 items divided into five sections as follows:

1. Demographics. This section includes the age and sex of each teacher as well as professional biodata regarding years of experience, grade level, subject taught, school location, and type of yearly schedule.

2. Teaching climate. Statements describing teaching conditions which are thought to promote effective and motivated performance are rated in an objective manner on a Likert-type agree-disagree scale as they pertain to the school in which the teacher works.

3. Causes. While the exact causes of burnout are as yet unconfirmed, this section of the measure lists the areas of stress or dissatisfaction commonly experienced by teachers in their jobs. These stressors are frequently associated with burnout in the literature.

They are rated by subjects on a Likert-type intensity scale (this section is also referred to as "stress/dissatisfaction" below).

4. Psychological effects. This is the part of the questionnaire which is an assessment of the level of burnout which the teacher is experiencing. Some of these items have been drawn from the MBI, and other scales, but adapted to apply directly to teachers and their job. Others were gleaned from the literature or from conversations with teachers themselves.

5. Physical effects. Since frequent reference is made in the literature to physical ailments associated with burnout, a yes-no checklist of the most commonly cited health problems is provided. Here subjects are to simply respond yes or no to each health item based upon the past 12 months.

In order to increase the accuracy and ease of scoring such a large number of questionnaires, teachers responded to the items on computer answer sheets which were electronically scored and prepared for computer analysis.

RESULTS

Sample Characteristics

There were 939 teachers from San Diego City Schools who responded to the survey questionnaire. It is estimated that this figure represents approximately 50% of those teachers who actually received the questionnaire. This sample consists of teachers from 24 geographical areas of the school district as determined by zip code, from all grade levels, from nine different subjects taught, and from a wide range of ages and years of experience. Of these respondents approximately 30% were men and 70% women. The age range was from 25 to 70 years; the mean age was 44. Most of the sample (87%) teach on the traditional yearly schedule of nine months on and three months off whereas a smaller number (13%) teach on a new year-round program of nine weeks on, three weeks off through all 12 months. Table 1 summarizes the

frequency distributions of cases for the demographic variables of years of teaching experience, years of teaching in San Diego, teaching level, subject taught, and school location by zip code (zip codes with fewer than five cases reporting were not considered).

The respondents were all members of the San Diego Teachers Association (SDTA). The membership of SDTA is closely aligned, demographically, with the total population of teachers in San Diego City Schools. The large number of respondents from SDTA was seen as a basis for implying that the representative integrity of the sample was maintained.

Table 1

Summary of Demographic Variables

A. Years of Teaching Experience

Years	Frequency	Percentage of Cases
1-5	69	7.4
6-10	135	14.5
11-15	193	20.7
16-20	210	22.5
Over 20	325	34.9

B. Years of Teaching in San Diego Public Schools

Years	Frequency	Percentage of Cases
1-5	131	14.1
6-10	148	16.0
11-15	210	22.7
16-20	190	20.5
Over 20	248	26.8

Table 1 (continued)

C. Teaching Level

Level	Frequency	Percentage of Cases
Elementary	485	52.7
Middle School*	17	1.8
Junior High	122	13.3
High School	239	26.0
Non-classroom**	57	6.2

*A middle school consists of grades 6, 7, and 8 rather than 7, 8, and 9 in a junior high school.

**These are roving special-purpose teachers.

D. Main Subject Taught*

Subject	Frequency	Percentage of Cases
English	76	16.0
Language Arts	38	8.0
Social Studies	58	12.2
Music/Art/Drama	24	5.1
Industrial Arts	22	4.6
Math	62	13.1
Science	19	4.0
Business	10	2.1
P.E.	31	6.5
Other	134	28.3

*Does not apply to elementary school teachers.

Table 1 (continued)

E. Zip Code of School*

Zip Code	Frequency	Percentage of Cases
92037	11	1.3
92101	33	3.9
92102	35	4.1
92103	30	3.5
92104	22	2.6
92105	28	3.3
92106	18	2.1
92107	13	1.5
92109	38	4.5
92110	24	2.8
92111	59	7.0
92113	56	6.6
92114	70	8.5
92115	49	5.8
92116	27	3.2
92117	47	5.5
92119	25	3.0
92120	41	4.8
92121	5	.6
92122	20	2.4
92123	26	3.1
92124	39	4.6
92126	92	10.9
92131	6	.7
92139	33	3.9

*Includes only schools with five or more cases responding.

Extent of the Problem

Psychological Effects

Total scores on the 19 psychological effects items (items 36 through 54) ranged from zero to 66 out of a possible range of 76. The mean total was 19.93 with a standard deviation of 12.89. Table 2 provides additional information regarding the number of cases and score ranges falling into the burnout categories of low, medium, and high. Table 3 reveals the frequency of responses for each of the five Likert-type response choices in this section of the instrument.

Table 2

Psychological Effects of Burnout

Burnout Level	Score Range	Frequency	%
Low	0-21	554	59.0
Moderate	22-43	342	36.4
High	44-66	41	4.4
$\bar{x}$ = 19.93	Standard Deviation = 12.89		

Table 3

Frequency of Answer Categories Chosen

Response		Frequency	%
Strongly Agree	(4)	1094	6.8
Agree	(3)	1932	12.0
Undecided	(2)	1319	8.2
Disagree	(1)	5061	31.4
Strongly Disagree	(0)	6700	41.6

Physical Effects

The physical effects of burnout were assessed by analyzing the total number of physical ailments checked by subjects on the questionnaire. The totals ranged from zero to 12 out of a possible 12. The mean score was 1.98. It was decided that a score of 0-1 would indicate a low level of physical suffering, 2-3 a moderate level, and over 3 a high level of suffering from physical ailments. Table 4 summarizes these findings.

Table 4

Physical Effects of Burnout

Burnout Level	Score	Frequency	%
Low	0-1	477	50.8
Moderate	2-3	271	28.9
High	4-12	191	20.3

Demographic Differences

Where appropriate, correlational analyses or analyses of variance were carried out to assess the relationship between the demographic variables in Section I of the questionnaire and measures of job stress and dissatisfaction (Section III) and burnout (Sections IV and V). No significant relationships were found with the exception of school location by zip code. In other words, differences between teachers as determined by age, sex, experience, subject taught, etc., did not account for differences in their stress and dissatisfaction on burnout scores.

However, small but significant differences were noted between the various locations of schools as determined by zip code. Zip codes varied significantly in the amount of physical burnout experienced (Section V), F (24,828) = 1.55, $p < .05$. A similar variation was found among zip codes with the amount of stress and dissatisfaction indicated by teachers (Section III), F (24,844) = 1.74, $p < .01$.

Teaching Climate Effects on Stress and Burnout

An overall opinion score for teaching climate, i.e., how a teacher's workplace contributes to a positive teaching experience, was obtained by summing the scores on ten teaching climate items (items 11 through 20). This total was then correlated with total stress/dissatisfaction (cause) scores (items 21-34) and total Psychological Effects and Physical Effects scores as determined above. Due to the large number of cases, very low correlations were invariably statistically significant at very high levels of confidence. Therefore, it was decided that only coefficients of .30 or higher would be considered meaningful. The correlation between Teaching Climate and total Stress/dissatisfaction was -.34 ($p < .001$). The correlation between Teaching Climate and Psychological Effects was -.33 ($p < .001$). The relationship between climate and physical effects was not significant based upon the imposed criterion. In order to further understand the nature of the significant correlations, additional calculations were performed correlating each teaching climate item with "cause" and Psychological Effects scores. These individual correlations are shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Correlation Coefficients for Teaching Climate Items with Stress/Dissatisfaction (Causes) and Psychological Burnout Scores

Item Number from Questionnaire	Correlation with Stress/ Dissatisfaction*	Correlation with Psychological Burnout*
11	-.17	-.22
12	-.16	-.17
13	-.28	-.27
14	-.22	-.13
15	-.21	-.25
16	-.23	-.23
17	-.21	-.17
18	-.31	-.21
19	-.27	-.21
20	-.15	-.21

*All correlations significant at the .001 level or greater.

Stress/Dissatisfaction and Burnout

Strong relationships were found when total stress/dissatisfaction scores were correlated with Psychological Effects scores (.54, $p < .001$) and with Physical Effects scores (.42, $p < .001$). Correlations between individual stress items and effects scores produced numerous significant coefficients with Psychological Effects and Physical Effects scores. These individual item correlations are shown in Table 7.

Rank Ordering of Items

Table 8 lists items from the "Causes," Psychological Effects, and Physical Effects sections of the questionnaire in rank order. Cause items and Psychological Effects items are ranked by mean score on each item while Physical Effects items are ranked by frequency of "yes" responses.

Table 7

Correlation Coefficients for Stress/Dissatisfaction (Cause) Items with Psychological and Physical Burnout

Item Number from Questionnaire	Correlation with Psychological Burnout*	Correlation with Physical Burnout*
21	.15	.16
22	.24	.21
23	.42	.27
24	.57	.38
25	.26	.22
26	.38	.23
27	.33	.23
28	.33	.25
29	.30	.25
30	.29	.26
31	.36	.26
32	.35	.31
33	.07**	.15
34	.27	.23

*All correlations significant at the .001 level or greater except as noted.

**Significant at .01 level.

Table 8

Rank Orders of Questionnaire Items

A. Stress/Dissatisfaction (Causes)

Rank	Item No. from Questionnaire	Mean Score
1	34	3.07
2	30	2.64
3	25	2.37
4	28	1.93
5	23	1.90
6	24	1.78
7	31	1.77
8	29	1.50
9	27	1.44
10	26	1.32
11	21	1.15
12	22	1.14
13	32	1.11
14	33	.99

B. Psychological Effects

Rank	Item No. from Questionnaire	Mean Score
1	36	2.54
2	42	1.76
3	40	1.76
4	43	1.62
5	54	1.44
6	39	1.12
7	53	1.10
8	37	1.08
9	50	1.06
10	47	.96
11	52	.92
12	51	.85
13	44	.83
14	41	.76
15	38	.65
16	48	.52
17	49	.52
18	45	.46
19	46	.19

Table 8 (continued)

C. Physical Effects.

Rank	Item No. from Questionnaire	f of 'yes'
1	61	297
2	56	296
3	63	282
4	57	272
5	62	154
6	59	113
7	60	99
8	58	95
9	65	58
10	55	57
11	66	51
12	64	46

DISCUSSION

The Magnitude of the Problem of Burnout

Three hundred and eighty-three teachers surveyed (40.8%) had psychological effects scores of 22 or higher which indicated moderate or high levels of burnout. Although the frequency distribution was weighted toward lower scores, a range of zero to 66 and a standard deviation of 12.89 indicated a great deal of variation among the respondents. A mean score of 19.93 could have been obtained by answering "disagree" to nearly all 19 items in this section of the questionnaire. This would, of course, indicate a low level of perceived burnout. However, judging from the distribution of answer categories checked (Table 3) this was not generally the case. Rather, a score of 19 was more likely obtained with high scoring answers on some effects items and low scoring answers on

others.

In considering specific psychological effects items (see Table 9), the feeling that teaching is emotionally draining was by far the strongest. This was followed by teachers' unhappiness in returning to the classroom after vacations, feeling depressed frequently about the teaching profession, feelings of hopelessness about their professional future, and feelings that their job is negatively affecting their health. The physical effects findings in this study were used for comparison purposes only. That is, to see which ailments are more prevalent than others and which groups of teachers suffer the physical effects of burnout the most. The responses were not compared to base rates of these conditions for the general population and therefore cannot be interpreted in absolute terms. The physical effects items consisted of ailments from which normal, healthy individuals should not suffer. Common health difficulties such as headaches, colds/flu, or diarrhea were preceded on the questionnaire with the word "frequent." Therefore, it was decided that any respondent who had suffered during the past year from more than one of the 12 conditions listed should be classified as experiencing a moderate level of burnout as judged by physical effects. More than three conditions was classified as a high level of burnout. Nearly half

(49.2%) of all teachers surveyed fell into the moderate or high burnout categories based upon physical effects.

There were four physical effects checked "yes" considerably more often than the others (see Table 9): frequent headaches, frequent back pain, insomnia, and frequent colds/flu, in that order. While these are the most common ailments on the list for the population in general, they are also most frequently associated with chronically anxiet-producing situations. The next four items in the sequence were checked less often, but are of a generally more serious nature: high blood pressure, frequent diarrhea, colitis, and dizzy spells. The final four physical effects items were checked relatively infrequently: frequent nausea, asthma, ulcer, frequent loss of appetite.

As stated in Chapter 1, teachers who are suffering from physical or psychological problems have a negative effect on the students they teach. While it is clear that over half of the teachers sampled do not appear to be suffering greatly from burnout, a large number of teachers are. If only the highest scoring 5% of the respondents, those teachers suffering the effects of burnout the most, are considered, they alone can contact as many as 9000 students in one school year. Therefore, to begin to intervene in this serious problem, it must be determined

which teachers are burning out.

Professional Characteristics (Demographics)

Contrary to past research (sparse as it is), no significant differences were found in the present study for psychological or physical effects of burnout or stress when considering teachers' age, sex, years of teaching experience, or grade level taught. New variables included in this questionnaire were type of yearly schedule, subject taught, and location of school by zip code. There were no differences in burnout found for teachers on a traditional schedule versus a new year-round system, nor between the various subjects taught. This is to say that, for example, Social Studies teachers are no more (or less) likely to experience burnout or suffer more or less job stress and dissatisfaction than Physical Education or Math teachers.

The lack of significant findings for these demographic variables using this relatively large sample (N = 939) very likely indicates that all teachers in the system are approximately equally susceptible (or resistant) to burnout, and experience similar levels of stress and dissatisfaction. Of course there may be other variables not included in this study on which teachers do vary.

The situational variable of school location was significant in relation to physical effects of burnout. While this

finding must be viewed with caution due to the large number of cases (and therefore a small, although significant, F ratio), it indicates that the location of the school where a teacher works may affect the level of burnout and stress or dissatisfaction the teacher experiences.

To attempt to determine possible reasons for the finding that school location is a meaningful moderator in both the "causes" and effects of burnout, these results were correlated with mean family income in the zip codes studied. Contrary to intuitive expectations, no significant correlations were revealed. Therefore, the socio-economic level of the area in which a school is located apparently does not account for these differences. A possible explanation for this is that within the San Diego City School District, a program of voluntary integration is in place which creates a socio-economic mix through special magnet programs (e.g., drama, Spanish, music, etc.). These programs draw students from all district areas and may also serve to equalize schools from a teacher's point of view in terms of facilities, and desirability of the work place.

Since this "obvious" reason (socio-economic) for the salient zip-code findings of this study was not supported, additional research, possibly in the form of on-site observations and interviews, will be necessary to uncover other possible explanations.

The Effect of Teaching Climate on the Burnout Process

The professional climate of the school in which a teacher works was shown to be related to the amount of total stress or dissatisfaction he or she experiences. It was found that teaching climate is also associated with overall levels of the psychological effects of burnout. Although these relationships may be partially accounted for by similar constructs being tapped by some items in each of the sections being correlated, the magnitude of the coefficients was quite convincing, given the large number of cases studied. Furthermore, somewhat different individual climate variables were related to stress/dissatisfaction and burnout. For example, an adequate supply of teaching materials, a voice in decisions about their jobs, and recognition for exceptional performance, in that order, appear to predict lower stress and dissatisfaction most strongly. However, lower psychologically assessed burnout is best predicted by teachers having a voice in decisions about their jobs, a unified striving for educational goals, and encouragement to be creative on the job.

It appears from these findings that it may be possible to alter the burnout process either by reducing stress and dissatisfaction or by reducing burnout itself

through the manipulation of the appropriate teaching climate variables at a particular school. This possibility must be addressed empirically.

Stress and Burnout--Inferring Cause and Effect

The existing body of literature concerning professional burnout consistently pairs stress-producing conditions on the job with burnout. The present study addressed this issue by including both a stress/dissatisfaction subscale and a burnout subscale in the same instrument. Since the analyses of these data are correlational, the usual difficulties of directionality and confidence in cause and effect relationships exist and may never be fully eliminated in burnout research. However, it is the opinion of the great majority of teachers questioned and of this researcher that it is indeed the stress and dissatisfaction on the job, produced by conditions tapped in the "Causes" section of the questionnaire, that produce the effects of burnout discussed previously.

The strongest correlational relationships in the present study were found between stress/dissatisfaction scores and effects scores, both psychological and physical. It appears, based upon the clear relationship found between total stress/dissatisfaction and the effects of burnout, that burnout can be predicted with a high degree

of confidence by the degree to which teachers experience stress and dissatisfaction in their jobs. Additional information was acquired by observing the individual correlation coefficients for each stress item, with total psychological and physical effects scores. Three specific stressors can be delineated as the best predictors of psychological burnout (see Table 7): classroom discipline and feelings of being trapped as above, but also lack of support services for personal problems and the public image of teachers.

An interesting finding which emerged from the analysis of the causes of burnout is that those stress and dissatisfaction items associated most strongly with burnout scores are not the same as the stress and dissatisfaction items which received the highest mean scores (Table 9). A comparison follows:

Top 5 "Causes" of Burnout	Top 5 Mean Score Stress/ Dissatisfaction Items
1. Feelings of being trapped in profession	1. Increased paperwork
2. Classroom discipline difficulties	2. Public image of teachers
3. Isolation from peers and colleagues	3. Low salary
4. Lack of support for professional problems	4. No participation in decisions about job
5. Lack of support for personal problems	5. Classroom discipline difficulties

Two possible interpretations of these findings come to mind. First, it may well be that what teachers say and

believe are the job components which create the most stress and dissatisfaction are not the ones which subtly and even unconsciously are promoting in them the conditions of burnout. In other words, while teachers verbalize a high level of stress and dissatisfaction due to increased paperwork, the poor public image of teachers, and low salaries, they are burning out because they feel trapped in the profession, are experiencing difficulties in classroom discipline, and feel isolated from fellow professionals.

The second explanation may be that teachers, as pragmatists, have focused their active and verbal attacks on those negative job components which they feel they have the best chance of changing. In the meantime, they may remain susceptible to burnout due to less identifiable and therefore less controllable job components.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings presented above would appear to indicate that "burnout" is a useful construct for analyzing and attacking personnel problems in a very large and diverse public school system. School boards, district administrators, and school administrators, as well as the teachers themselves are acutely aware of a multitude of problems in American school systems, but the problems themselves have not been clearly delineated, much less the solutions.

It is conceivable that with continued research into the various characteristics of teachers and teachers' jobs which fall under the descriptor of burnout, common understandings and common goals will emerge and eventually real improvements in public education can be made.

The study of burnout can and should broaden to include other organizations whose business it is to help, such as hospitals and social welfare agencies. These institutions must be studied studied individually, however, and a "blanket" approach should be avoided for the most meaningful results.

Suggestions for Future Research

The results of this study create some interesting possibilities for further research. Since schools differ by location, studies can be made in the individual schools in the study to determine more precisely what causes such differences. It may then be possible to conduct experiments manipulating these causes and measuring changes in levels of burnout. It is the continuing work in this direction which will eventually lead to realistic and successful burnout intervention and prevention techniques.

Another useful line of research would be to gather similar data from other school districts around the county. In this way determinations can be made regarding regional differences in burnout.

Finally, this project can serve as a guideline for expanding and refining the questionnaire with the goal of creating a widely useful instrument for the measurement of professional burnout among public school teachers.

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APPENDIX A

SDTA TEACHER BURNOUT QUESTIONNAIRE

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

SDTA TEACHER BURNOUT QUESTIONNAIRE

The San Diego Teachers Association is sponsoring this questionnaire to assess the problem of burnout among teachers in San Diego City Schools. In responding to the items below, PLEASE USE THE COMPUTER ANSWER SHEET PROVIDED WITH THIS QUESTIONNAIRE and return to your SDTA Rep. by FEBRUARY 1st, 1984. Thank you. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

PLEASE PENCIL-IN THE CIRCLE ON YOUR ANSWER SHEET WHICH INDICATES YOUR ANSWER TO EACH OF THE FOLLOWING ITEMS. (Use No. 2 pencil.)

Item

1. First number in your age.
2. Second number in your age.
3. Sex. (0) Male (1) Female
4. Years of teaching experience:
   (0) 1-5 (1) 6-10 (2) 11-15
   (3) 16-20 (4) Over 20
5. Years of teaching in San Diego City Schools
   (0) 1-5 (1) 6-10 (2) 11-15
   (3) 16-20 (4) Over 20
6. Yearly Schedule:
   (0) Traditional (1) Year-round

Item

7. Teaching level now:
   (0) Elementary (1) Middle School
   (2) Junior High (3) High School
   (4) Non-classroom
8. Main subject area taught (Secondary only)
   (0) English (1) Language Arts
   (2) Social Studies (3) Art/Music/Drama
   (4) Industrial Arts (5) Math
   (6) Science (7) Business
   (8) P.E. (9) Other_____
9. 4th digit in your school's ZIP code.
10. 5th digit in your school's ZIP code.

TEACHING CLIMATE:

Please indicate on your answer sheet, your agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements as they apply to the school at which you are now teaching. Fill in the appropriate circle on your answer sheet for each item, using the following scoring key:
(0) Strongly disagree (1) Disagree (2) Undecided (3) Agree (4) Strongly agree

11. There is a sense of teamwork among teachers at my school.
12. Parents are involved with their children's education here.
13. The teachers at my school have an effective voice in important decisions affecting our jobs.
14. Rules which apply to teachers at this school are few and flexible.
15. My school is unified in striving for clear educational goals.
16. Teachers at my school are encouraged to try new and creative solutions for existing problems.
17. The facilities at my school (buildings, classrooms, furniture, etc.) are adequately maintained.
18. My school has enough materials for teachers to be effective.
19. Teachers at my school are recognized for exceptional performance.
20. My school has programs designed to motivate the students.

CAUSES:

Please indicate on your answer sheet the extent to which each of the following items contributes to your feelings of stress or dissatisfaction in your job as teacher. Fill in the appropriate circle on your answer sheet using the following scoring key:
(0) No impact (1) Mild impact (2) Moderate impact (3) Strong impact
(4) Severe impact

Item

21. Lack of job security or continuity.
22. Threat of student violence or vandalism.
23. Classroom discipline difficulties.
24. Feelings of being trapped in the profession.
25. Low salary.
26. Isolation from peers and colleagues.
27. Conflicts with administration.
28. Lack of participation in decisions about job.
29. Negative contacts with parents.
30. Public image of teachers.
31. Lack of support services for professional problems.
32. Lack of support services for personal problems.
33. Threat of school closings.
34. Increased paper work.
35. Other:_____

PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS:

Please indicate on your answer sheet your agreement or lack of agreement with each of the following statements. Fill in the appropriate circle on your answer sheet for each item using the following scoring key:
(0) Strongly disagree (1) Disagree (2) Undecided (3) Agree (4) Strongly agree

36. Teaching drains me emotionally.
37. I dread going to work each day.
38. I often take sick days.
39. I feel it's impossible for me to make a positive difference in my students' lives.
40. I feel depressed frequently about my profession.
41. I go through the motions of teaching each day without much involvement.
42. After vacations, I am usually unhappy about returning to the classroom.
43. I have feelings of hopelessness about my professional future.
44. I feel I might really have a nervous breakdown someday, if I don't stop teaching.
45. I am worried that I'm drinking too much alcohol.
46. I am worried that I'm taking too many drugs.
47. Sometimes I tend to treat students as impersonal objects.
48. I feel my students are "the enemy."

49. I feel my students really dislike me.
50. It's impossible to deal with students on an individual, personal basis.
51. I feel personally alienated from my fellow teachers.
52. I feel professionally alienated from my fellow teachers.
53. My profession is negatively affecting my personal relationships outside of work.
54. I feel that my job is negatively affecting my health.

PHYSICAL EFFECTS:

Have you suffered from any of the following health difficulties over the past 12 months? Please respond on your answer sheet as follows:

(0) No (1) Yes

55. Asthma
56. Frequent back pain
57. Frequent colds/flu
58. Colitis
59. Frequent diarrhea
60. Dizzy spells
61. Frequent headaches
62. High blood pressure
63. Insomnia
64. Frequent loss of appetite
65. Frequent nausea
66. Ulcer

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS IMPORTANT STUDY. PLEASE RETURN THE QUESTIONNAIRE AND ANSWER SHEET TO YOUR SDTA REPRESENTATIVE NO LATER THAN FEBRUARY 1st, 1984. PLEASE DO NOT FOLD! RESULTS OF THE STUDY WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE TO YOU BY SDTA.

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